



Sara M. Bonser
Superintendent of Schools

September 30, 2020

The Honorable Dan Huberty
Texas House of Representatives
Committee on Public Education
Submitted by email to education@house.texas.gov

Dear Chairman Huberty:

Plano ISD is responsible for providing a high-quality public education to more than 50,000 students in our area. Our schools are routinely named the number one reason new residents move to Plano, and we thrive on these high expectations from our community. With this letter, we are providing input on the Public Education Committee's [Interim Charge on COVID](#) as it relates to our experiences in Plano ISD.

Information Sought:

1. Are Texas public schools ensuring the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester? When applicable, please speak directly to classroom and lab settings, and cafeterias.

It has been a challenge to provide the space and personal protection equipment necessary to ensure the safety of staff and students. In Plano ISD, we were fortunate to have about 50% of our families select School@Home. However, the cost of the personal protection equipment and access to timely shipments has been difficult. If more families elect to come back, those costs will continue to rise. While we continue to move money around in the budget to pay for these protection measures, the ability to keep that from impacting our programs and services becomes more and more difficult. Classrooms need desk dividers, improved air filtration, continuous supplies of disinfectants, masks, shields and washing stations.

We have found different opportunities and challenges with a variety of classes and settings. Specifically, we have found labs to be easier to continue to administer safely. Plano ISD's Education Foundation has funded virtual software that our science and foreign language classrooms are utilizing. These types of programs keep everyone safe and participating in labs that are an essential part of the learning process and critical to student engagement. The State of Texas could consider funding this type of software for districts to increase learning and minimize opportunities for COVID-19 exposure. Cafeterias are a challenge due to the fact that they are spread throughout our campuses. The two particular areas of concerns with cafeterias are (1) the food service and ensuring that the furniture, equipment, and personal protection needed to utilize the cafeteria safely are available, and (2) our declining food service revenue due to the significant number of students learning at home or not participating in the program at school. The result of this lost revenue will negatively impact our Child/Nutrition budget and create an additional loss that needs to be absorbed within our budget.

2. What plans are in place for on-campus COVID-19 testing? Do school districts have the capacity to provide testing on campus, both in terms of available supplies and labs to process tests?

Plano ISD is not currently seeking to become a testing source. School nurses, our qualified medical professionals, are already tasked with being the medical expert on campus, as well as the close contact tracer within the campus. In addition to all of the regular nursing duties assigned, we don't believe that adding the additional responsibility of COVID testing, and all that would require of them, to be a realistic request. In addition, there is concern with regard to the potential liabilities associated with conducting testing on our campuses. Testing is widely available in our community so we do not anticipate needing to become a testing site.

3. If applicable, what are plans for athletics this Fall? How will student athletes be kept safe? If fans will be permitted to attend events, how will fans be kept safe?

Athletic events are just now beginning to be held. We are instituting safety protocols and PPE at all games for our athletes and all students who participate in the events (cheer/drill/band). All are expected to social distance and wear masks at all times. In addition, seating is limited to about 40% of stadium capacity. No season tickets have been sold - another loss in revenue for the school district - to allow families of participants to have the first option for tickets. Safety monitors who work at all of our games are monitoring the protocols put in place and communicated by the Athletic Department. The major concern at this point is the cancellation of games due to a team having a COVID outbreak where a student is positive and some or all of the team must be quarantined for close contact. We believe we can keep people safe at the game, but managing COVID-positive athletes and contact quarantines will create enormous operating challenges for the completion of seasons, game schedules and even play offs. In just our first week back, we had to cancel three varsity events, two of which were district competitions.

4. What do projected enrollment figures and formula funding look like for this school year?

Plano ISD's enrollment is down 2,225 students from projected enrollment. **Using the 2019-2020 Net FSP Revenue per ADA, that is \$9,205/student, which nets a calculated revenue loss from COVID of \$13,660,345.** Furthermore, the extraordinarily difficult attendance-taking process for asynchronous learning further exacerbates the issue and contributes to a 1% decline in ADA. Finally, getting our free and reduced lunch applications back has dropped our Economically Disadvantaged rate from 33% down to 25%. We are working hard to find our families and get them signed up, but it has been extremely difficult. This will have far-reaching implications on compensatory education funding, Title 1 funding, and many provisions of HB3.

5. Has there been a noticeable impact on staff or faculty retention with regard to concerns about the pandemic?

Yes, Plano ISD has seen a higher rate of resignations and retirements, as well as more staff on leave for ADA, than ever before. Our usual rate of turnover is about 10%. We are currently hovering around 14% and we anticipate more losses at the end of this first semester. Finding substitutes is almost impossible. The training that we must do with every new employee or substitute teacher is significant in regard to protocols, technology, and curriculum. As Superintendent, the low morale and high stress levels of our teachers is something I have never seen before in my 31 years in public education. Teachers work from morning until night - most working more than 12-hour days. Not only are they delivering tutorials and emailing parents and students in the evenings, but they now must also reconcile attendance each day, a

task which used to take minutes and now requires a half hour. We are providing social and emotional learning and activities to staff as we know they are exhausted, and it is only September. We are worried about our teachers and terribly concerned about the long-term implications this may create for the teaching profession and pipeline of talent, as many leave the industry entirely and future students become reluctant to pursue teaching careers. We are running two education systems with the same amount of staff and it is nearly an impossible feat. With students having the ability to change learning environments at the grading periods, this further shifts teachers' entire worlds again as kids keep moving in and out of classrooms. It is hard to be a teacher or a principal this year.

6. How have state and federal COVID-related funds already impacted budgets?

Plano ISD submitted for reimbursement from CRF the allowable purchases during March-May and that was only \$16,813. In addition, we applied for SHARS relief for \$94,471 and FEMA for \$12,299. The cost to the district for expenses that are so far not reimbursable equals \$4,722,239 and is climbing. With the small amount we have been able to claim through state and federal funds, we are essentially bearing the cost locally with a budget that was already stretched too thin. The City of Plano provided \$500,000 to us for PPE costs, but Collin County denied our request for \$90,000 for Operation Connectivity for undetermined reasons. We believe we have exhausted our opportunities for additional funding and yet our need has never been greater.

7. How has the pandemic affected the overall financial status of small and rural school districts?

NA

Thank you for your time and consideration of the information provided herein. Plano ISD is eager to be a resource for the Public Education Committee as we continue to navigate these very challenging times.

Sincerely,



Sara Bonser
Superintendent of Schools
Plano ISD